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## Networks of solidarity: The London left and the 1984–85 miners' strike

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In March 1984 the majority of British miners walked out on strike against the threat of widespread pit closures. Unlike the 1972 and 1974 coal disputes during the previous Conservative government, this was to be a lengthy and ultimately unsuccessful struggle, ending a year later with no agreement and the National Coal Board's Ian McGregor promising to teach miners 'the price of insubordination and insurrection'.<sup>1</sup> Although many miners and their families were undoubtedly focused on defending jobs and communities, the strike had a much wider political resonance. The dispute was perceived by some as a showdown between the Thatcher government and the labour movement and broader left.<sup>2</sup> The sense that the miners had a 'very special place in the British Labour movement', and since the early 1970s in particular could be portrayed as something like a vanguard, explained in part why the strike became a focus for so many.<sup>3</sup>

This appeal was broad. London-based Trinidadian activist and writer John La Rose argued that 'no single battle of the working class and people in Britain has aroused so much passion and attracted so much solidarity from black workers and unemployed [sic...] What has struck us and won our admiration has been the courage, determination and heroism of the miners and their families, especially the women in their organisations'.<sup>4</sup> Around the

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<sup>1</sup> G. Turner, 'MacGregor Sums Up', *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 March 1985, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> For example, see Brian Flynn, Larry Goldsmith, and Bob Sutcliffe, 'We Danced in the Miners' Hall: An Interview with "Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners 1984-1985"', *Radical America* 19, 2–3, (1985), p. 40; 'Editorial', *Lesbian and Gay Socialist*, Summer 1984, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> 'Support for the Miners', *UCATT Viewpoint*, July 1984, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> J. La Rose, 'The Miners' Experience of the Police, the Magistrates, the Judges and the Courts', *Race Today*, May/June 1985, p. 6.

dispute developed a large and diverse support movement both within and beyond the coalfields. Compared to the 1970s miners' strikes, secondary industrial action by other trade unionists was relatively sparse and ineffectual. Nevertheless, the ability to sustain the strike for a year relied partly on the mass fundraising efforts of the large support networks.

This chapter focuses on the role of London's radical left in this solidarity campaign. As Jonathan Saunders noted, far-left organisations produced 'mountains of literature' on the strike, and 'each organisation had its own particular slogan or formula' that they believed was the key to victory.<sup>5</sup> I mostly avoid these debates. Instead, I emphasise how activists constructed networks of solidarity between London and the coalfields. By discussing feminist, black, and lesbian and gay support groups, I highlight how the miners' industrial struggle resonated and was politicised in diverse ways. I argue that this support contested the boundaries of class politics and the radical left, reflecting a broader period of flux and realignment. The divisions and weaknesses of the radical left prevented it from independently developing mass action that could have had a decisive impact on the strike. Nevertheless, I argue that this history helps us understand how solidarity can be constructed between diverse places and groups of people.

### **Networks of solidarity**

Solidarity networks between London and the coalfields could develop in relatively informal, small scale ways through the connections of radical left activists. Anarchist miner Dave Douglass, for instance, noted that Beetham Miners' Support Group in Yorkshire was launched with support from Class War and the anarchist lesbian and gay group Wolverine in London.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> J. Saunders, *Across Frontiers: International Support for the Miners' Strike* (London: Canary, 1989), p. 261.

<sup>6</sup> D. Douglass, *Ghost Dancers: The Miners' Last Generation* (Hastings: Read 'n' Noir, 2010), p. 50.

Such connections could bring miners to London and shape their experiences in the capital. Norman Strike was a Durham miner who joined the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). In his diary he describes staying in Willesden Green on the settee of Chris Dean, a fellow SWP member and musician in the Redskins, while fundraising in London. Strike discusses how ‘a London comrade took me to a DHSS office in Harrow and the workers there have agreed to support the kitchen, which is brilliant.’ He ‘spent the week visiting colleges and factories from Kilburn to Croydon’. Strike later moved from Dean’s couch to stay with ‘an SWP comrade’ in Croydon who took him to speak to a large group of union stewards in a local factory.<sup>7</sup> A report by members of Brent Miners Support Group complaining that ‘various fringe bodies have been involved in taking “their” miners to workplaces and meetings, collecting money’ suggests that Strike’s experience reflected a broader pattern.<sup>8</sup> This echoes Saunders’ research on the international support movement, which notes how far-left organisations helped organise speaking and fundraising tours internationally when the official trade union movement limited their involvement to messages of support.<sup>9</sup> The newspapers and magazines of the radical left also helped connect supporters and mining areas by listing pits and food kitchens in need of help.<sup>10</sup>

The involvement of the Redskin’s Chris Dean also highlights the contribution of musicians and countercultural currents more broadly. Countless fundraisers for the miners featuring alternative cabaret, music and theatre took place in London throughout the year of the strike.<sup>11</sup> Later in the dispute elements of this milieu organised collectively as Pit Dragon.

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<sup>7</sup> N. Strike, *Strike by Name: One Man’s Part in the 1984/5 Miners’ Strike* (London: Bookmarks, 2009), pp. 132–6.

<sup>8</sup> S. Adams and T. Durkin, ‘Some Observations and Suggestions to Help Improve NUM Picketing Based on Our Local Experience’ (n.d.), Brent Archives (BA), 19885/SC/4/2.

<sup>9</sup> Saunders, *Across Frontiers*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>10</sup> D. Massey and H. Wainwright, ‘Beyond the Coalfields: The Work of the Miners’ Support Groups’, in H. Beynon (ed), *Digging Deeper: Issues in the Miners’ Strike* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 164.

<sup>11</sup> See 1984-5 issues of *Time Out* and *City Limits*.

The *NME* described how the group had ‘harness[ed] the talents of almost every worthwhile artist on the seamier side of the London cabaret circuit and the potential exists to develop it into the most dynamic political/cultural organisation since Rock Against Racism.’<sup>12</sup> There were certainly threads connecting Rock Against Racism through Pit Dragon to Red Wedge later in the decade. As well as raising funds, Pit Dragon performed outside Neasden power station in north-west London, ‘bringing art and entertainment onto the picket line—where it belongs!’<sup>13</sup> The *NME* commented: ‘Scab lorries turned back by a variety show? Surely a first in the annals of industrial struggle.’<sup>14</sup>

The picket line was a key space in which solidarity could be enacted and diverse forms of politics could meet. Members of far-left organisations, along with others, also attempted to build support in their localities, taking the politics of the strike to people’s homes and workplaces. In Tottenham, north London, for example, the Communist Party (CP) carried out house to house food collections and the SWP’s Dave McKay was particularly active in visiting factories to build support.<sup>15</sup> The radical left also helped highlight the miners’ cause in London’s universities and polytechnics where staff and student supporters organised collections, held meetings and gave use of their facilities to miners.<sup>16</sup> The spaces in which people campaigned tended to reflect their politics. London feminists in Lambeth described taking women from South Wales to raise support in places that they believed ‘men couldn’t or wouldn’t go: refuges, single parents’ groups, one o’clock clubs, schools, community, youth and health centres.’ One of the group commented that she ‘felt so excited sitting in a

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<sup>12</sup> S. Williams, ‘Dragon on Picket Line!’, *New Musical Express*, 23 February 1985, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> ‘London Commitment - Neasden Picket: Magic!’, *Valleys Star*, 27 February 1985, South Wales Miners’ Library (SWML).

<sup>14</sup> Williams, ‘Dragon on Picket Line!’

<sup>15</sup> J. Rouffiniac (ed), *Haringey Supporting the Miners 1984-1985* (London: Haringey Trades Union Council Support Unit, 1985), pp. 22, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Socialist Worker Student Society, ‘Victory to the Miners!’ (leaflet, 1984), University of Westminster Archives, PCL/2/5/43.

community centre listening to South London women enthusiastically discussing day to day life through the strike with women from pit villages.<sup>17</sup>

Sections of the radical left clearly saw the strike as a vindication of a particular type of class politics. Tariq Ali argued that the involvement of women in the coalfields suggested a 'happy marriage between feminism and industrial militancy' that contradicted those 'who were not long ago whispering in corridors and declaiming at dinner parties that "picketing was a form of machismo"', that the tactics of the Greenham women "showed the way forward" and were universally applicable, and that the miners were irredeemably wedded to a male-dominated view of the world'. The function of such arguments, Ali claimed, was to use feminism as a bridge away from working-class politics.<sup>18</sup> In fact, strong connections were made with the women of Greenham, which had originated in a march from South Wales.<sup>19</sup> Reciprocal visits between the Greenham Camp and the coalfields, and support from Greenham activists in London and elsewhere, feature frequently in accounts of the time.<sup>20</sup> This suggests a more complex meeting of different types of politics than Ali perceived.

Arguably Greenham women, including London-based supporters, developed the strongest connections with mining areas of any feminists partly due to a shared hostility to the nuclear industry.<sup>21</sup> There was, however, broad feminist activism in support of the strike,

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<sup>17</sup> 'Striking New Connections', *Spare Rib*, 153, April (1985), pp. 32–33.

<sup>18</sup> T. Ali, untitled article, *Time Out*, 9 August 1984, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> M. Shaw, 'Women in Protest and beyond: Greenham Common and Mining Support Groups' (PhD dissertation, Durham University, 1993); Wales Congress in Support of Mining Communities, 'Democracy, Thatcherism and the Miners' Strike' (n.d.), Labour History Archive and Study Centre (LHASC), CP/LON/IND/2/16.

<sup>20</sup> D. Humber, 'Report on Greenham Common', *Here We Go - Bulletin of the Nottinghamshire Women's Support Groups*, January 1985, LHASC/MS84/MW/5/4; Anonymous, interview by B. Heathfield transcript no. 12 (n.d., c. 1984-85), the Women's Library at the London School of Economics (TWL), 7BEH/1/1/12; 'Report on Demonstration and Rally in Portsmouth', in Neath and District Miners' Support Group minutes book, 27 June 1984, Richard Burton Archives, University of Swansea (RBA), MND/25 Box 4; Hefina Headon and Ali Thomas, interview by Hywel Francis, 19 November 1985, SWML/AUD/510.

<sup>21</sup> B. Norden, 'Many Visions - Many Hands', *Spare Rib*, 185, September (1985), pp. 6–8, 32–34; Liz and Rosemary, 'Greenham Women for a Miners' Victory', *Black Dragon*, 1, January (1985), p. 8; Liz et al., letter to *Spare Rib*, 155, June (1985), p. 31.

often inspired by the widespread and prominent involvement of coalfield women.<sup>22</sup> While it is understandable to represent the relationship between the coalfields and London in terms of ‘working-class women and middle-class feminists’<sup>23</sup>—and certainly this forms part of the picture—the networks of support were more complex. The South East Region TUC (SERTUC) Women’s Committee, for example, organised a meeting bringing together activists from Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) and Greenham Common, but also women cleaners striking against pay cuts at Barking Hospital.<sup>24</sup> The hospital cleaners were joined on their picket line by miners, and women’s groups from Kent and Wales continued the support after the miners’ dispute. The solidarity was mutual: Barking workers joined miners’ power station pickets and visited the Kent coalfield.<sup>25</sup> Another ‘Women in Struggle’ meeting in east London had speakers from the Derbyshire coalfield, the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, and a former Armagh Irish republican prisoner.<sup>26</sup> The miners’ support campaign could therefore draw together national and international struggles, constructing what Brown and Yaffe have described as ‘counter topographies of resistance’.<sup>27</sup>

While support groups constructed varying solidarity coalitions, there was a shared sense of the interconnection of different struggles, and arguably an early politics of intersectionality. Women activists supporting the miners engaged with class politics, feminism, sexuality, and as in the example above, national liberation struggles. Women from

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<sup>22</sup> See for example Pragna Patel and Gail Lewis interviews by Rachel Cohen, 2011, Sisterhood and After: The Women’s Liberation Oral History Project, British Library.

<sup>23</sup> L. Loach, ‘We’ll Be Right Here to the End ... And After: Women in the Miners’ Strike’, in Beynon (ed), *Digging Deeper*, p. 169.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Field, letter to Hilary Wainwright, 29 May 1984, BA/SC/2; Anonymous, interview by B. Heathfield transcript no. 24, (n.d., c. 1984-85), TWL/7BEH/1/1/24.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Barking Hospital Strike News’, no. 12, 19-22 May 1985, Hackney Archives (HA), D/5/52/6/1/47; B. Neal, ‘Barking Hospital Women Fight On’, *London Labour Briefing*, 41, July (1984), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Action’, *City Limits*, 177, 22-28 February 1985, pp. 18–19.

<sup>27</sup> G. Brown and H. Yaffe, ‘Practices of Solidarity: Opposing Apartheid in the Centre of London’, *Antipode* 46, 1 (2014), p. 44; see also C. Katz, ‘On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement’, *Signs* 26, 4 (2001), pp. 1213–1234.

the Nottinghamshire coalfield visited Northern Ireland to show support for republican women in Armagh jail who were subject to strip searches.<sup>28</sup> The Troops Out Movement (TOM), an organisation formed in London in 1973 to campaign for British troops to leave Northern Ireland and for Irish self-determination, similarly organised visits of miners to Ireland.<sup>29</sup> Such solidarity networks moved beyond simply asserting connections to enable direct personal experiences of the issues being discussed. These meetings could be uncomfortable, however, especially as it was not unusual for miners to have family serving in the British army in Ireland. A Leicestershire miner taken to Belfast by TOM commented that it ‘was awkward for me because my family was military – I’d got brothers in the army – but I thought I’d go over and see what it was all about’.<sup>30</sup> Others appeared less conflicted. A South Yorkshire miner who visited Belfast described ‘talking to a soldier whose dad is a miner’. These working-class soldiers, he believed, were ‘traitors to their class.’<sup>31</sup> These visits highlight the complex overlapping geographies evident during the strike: a campaign established in London taking miners from the British coalfields to visit Belfast.

Such connections found a distorted echo in Conservative attempts to represent the NUM as an extremist threat comparable to the IRA. Attorney General Michael Havers reportedly suggested that ‘the IRA and Arthur Scargill are in a sense very similar.’ While miners were not involved in killing or bombing, ‘Scargill and the IRA have one ambition in common – to bring down the accepted democratic system of government’.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps as a

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Stop Strip Searches’, *Here We Go - Bulletin of the Nottinghamshire Women’s Support Groups*, February 1985, TUC Library Collections, London Metropolitan University (TUCLC), Miners’ Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only box no. 1, ‘Women Against Pit Closures and Womens’ Support Groups’ folder.

<sup>29</sup> A. Renwick, ‘Something in the Air: The Rise of the Troops Out Movement’, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 19 August 1999, <http://republican-news.org/archive/1999/August19/18troo.html> (accessed 13 May 2016).

<sup>30</sup> D. Bell, *The Dirty Thirty: Heroes of the Miners’ Strike* (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2009), p. 94.

<sup>31</sup> J. Lovibon, ‘T.O.M.’s Delegation to Belfast’, *Troops Out of Ireland*, October 1984, p. 8. Available at the Archive of the Irish in Britain, London Metropolitan University.

<sup>32</sup> J. Knight, ‘Britain’s Crisis of Law and Disorder – by the Attorney General’, *Sunday Mirror*, 21 October 1984, pp. 6-7.

result, the comparison was not always welcomed on the left. A letter to *Socialist Worker* criticised repeated attempts by the paper to draw such links: 'There is nothing in common between terrorists like the IRA and miners engaged in legitimate trade union activity'.<sup>33</sup> A meeting organised in London by Black Delegation to the Mining Communities (BDMC), with speakers from the coalfields, the PLO and Sinn Féin, was held in the Greater London Council's (GLC) County Hall with the support of Ken Livingstone. Former Yorkshire miner Roy Mason, an NUM sponsored Labour MP for Barnsley and Northern Ireland Secretary in the 1970s, expressed himself 'horrified' and claimed that the PLO and Sinn Féin were using Livingstone to undermine the strike.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, TOM emphasised historical links between British miners and Ireland, including support from the Miners Federation of Great Britain during the 1913 Dublin lockout, and drew attention to the use in mining communities of police tactics developed in Northern Ireland. 'It is a sad irony' they argued, that some of the techniques being used against the miners were developed while Roy Mason 'oversaw British rule in Northern Ireland in the late seventies during one of its most vicious phases'.<sup>35</sup> The idea that the state violence facing the miners could encourage mutual solidarity with other oppressed groups was a central argument for TOM, but also for a number of other groups including BDMC.

### **Generative solidarity**

BDMC was a coalition of radical black activist groups—including Southall Black Sisters, Camden Black Workers Group, Kings Cross Women's Centre and the Southall Monitoring

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<sup>33</sup> J. Shepard, letter to *Socialist Worker*, 12 May 1984, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> 'IRA and PLO Pledge to Miners', *East Anglia Daily Times*, 8 December 1984, pp. 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> 'Miners and Ireland', *Troops Out of Ireland*, June 1984, p. 11; see also P. Hillyard, 'Lessons from Ireland', in B. Fine and R. Millar (eds), *Policing the Miners' Strike* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), pp. 177–87.

Group—that organised together to support the strike.<sup>36</sup> Pragna Patel, a member of Southall Black Sisters and BDMC, spoke to the Elvington Miners Wives Support Committee in Kent, telling them that she hoped ‘there would now be a more concrete unity between the Black and mining communities, based on their shared experiences of policing methods.’<sup>37</sup> Reflecting some years later, Patel again emphasised the importance of the militarised and politicised ‘police assault’ faced by miners, which ‘was similar to what black people had faced [...] in Brixton, in Southall, [...] and Northern Ireland for example’.<sup>38</sup> Similar arguments were made by John La Rose, who spoke at a miners’ solidarity meeting in Hackney representing the Alliance of Black Parents Movement, the Black Youth Movement and the Race Today Collective, and donated money to the miners’ appeal on behalf of the New Beacon Bookshop in Finsbury Park.<sup>39</sup> He argued in *Race Today* that during the strike ‘the mineworkers learned what the black population have had to learn during 30 years of hard experience with the police and the courts. Some miners even said: We did not believe what you were saying about the police before but now we understand.’<sup>40</sup> Accounts from miners and their families themselves, at least those active in the strike, frequently attest to this shift in consciousness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Black Delegation to the Miners, ‘Support the Miners’ (leaflet, June 1984), London Metropolitan Archives, 4463/b/17/01/005.

<sup>37</sup> M. Bishop, ‘Black Delegation to Kent Miners’, *Spare Rib*, 145, August (1984), p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> Patel, interview by Cohen.

<sup>39</sup> Hackney Miners Support Committee, ‘Hackney Pit Prop’, February 1985, LHASC/CP/LON/IND/2/16; Hackney Miners Support Committee, leaflet for ‘Solidarity with the Miners’ rally, 17 January 1985, George Padmore Institute, GB 2904 LRA/01/0563; John La Rose, letter to the Miners Families Christmas Appeal, 5 December 1984, LHASC/WAIN/1/2.

<sup>40</sup> La Rose, ‘The Miners’ Experience’. Miners had of course experienced state violence in the past. Nevertheless, the intensity of state oppression was clearly experienced as new by many, and the direct personal experience of police occupying mining communities had a deep impact. See P. Green, *The Enemy Without: Policing and Class Consciousness in the Miners’ Strike* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1990).

<sup>41</sup> For example, see M. Farrar, ‘From Orgreave to Broadwater Farm’, *Emergency*, 4, (n.d., c. 1985-6), pp. 50-53; South Yorkshire WAPC, ‘Education on Racism’, *Women’s Pit Prop*, 1, May-June (1985), Doncaster Archives, DZMD/873/1/1; J. Ware (director), *Keresley: A Village and a Strike*, Central Television, <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-keresley-a-village-and-a-strike-1985> (accessed 26 July 2016).

Alongside these shared experience, it was the personal relationships developed through the solidarity networks that encouraged new ways of thinking. Patel explained that BDMC took coachloads of people and Indian food to the Kent coalfield: 'often the mining communities had never met or talked to Indian people or Asian people. And so there was a real camaraderie'. Although they were not 'necessarily all progressive on race issues [...] they were exposed to seeing black women on picket lines and at the mining communities at the coalface, you know, supporting them.'<sup>42</sup> However, the coalfields were not entirely white.<sup>43</sup> Black London feminist Gail Lewis described connections she developed with Asian women organising in Yorkshire through WAPC during the strike. This contrasted with the few contacts with white feminists she had outside of London.<sup>44</sup> BDMC also visited Nottinghamshire and campaigned jointly with black activists in the area from outside the coal industry. Together they visited Gedling Colliery, where there was a strong black presence, in an apparently unsuccessful attempt to convince non-strikers to join the dispute.<sup>45</sup>

Striking black miners also travelled to London, speaking at meetings and raising funds at a number of events.<sup>46</sup> Most notably, black miners worked with BDMC to raise a reported £2,500 and distribute 'Black people support the miners' badges at the 1984 Notting Hill

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<sup>42</sup> Patel, interview by Cohen.

<sup>43</sup> Estimates of around 3,000 black miners seem to have been circulating at the time, although only Ron Ramdin, who wrote that he was given the number by a black NUM official during the 1972 miners' strike, provides any source. See R. Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1987), p. 474; 'Black Miners Seek Support', *Caribbean Times*, 24 August 1984, p. 3; O. Vassell, 'The Boys from the Black Stuff', *West Indian World*, 19 September 1984, p. 6. Gary Morris, who interviewed black miners in Nottinghamshire during the strike, believed there were at least 1,000 across the coalfields. See G. Morris, 'Black Miners and the Miners' Strike', *New Beacon Review*, November 1986, pp. 40-47.

<sup>44</sup> Lewis, interview by Cohen.

<sup>45</sup> Morris, 'Black Miners'; 'Black People Support the Miners', *The Voice*, 8 December 1984, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see T. van Gelderen, 'Brent Miners' Support Group', *London Labour Briefing*, 44, November (1984), p. 5; Rouffiniac, *Haringey Supporting the Miners 1984-1985*, p. 28; 'Black People Support Striking Miners', *Searchlight*, April 1985, pp. 16-17.

Carnival.<sup>47</sup> Simon Berlin from Lambeth NALGO described collecting there with Staffordshire miners: 'they had never been to London before, and they said they would remember the day for the rest of their lives – because it was the spirit of unity and harmony on that day that was the urban expression of the life they knew in their own villages, and the miners were a natural and feted component at the carnival'.<sup>48</sup> The *Caribbean Times* noted that the links made at carnival were significant as connections between black miners and black organisations had been rare.<sup>49</sup> Therefore in some instances, in Notting Hill and as described by Lewis for example, networks of translocal black solidarity were developed in addition to connections between white miners and black Londoners.

Yorkshire miner Dave Douglass explained that for those in the coalfields actively involved in the strike, the experience allowed them to 'think unthinkable things, to embrace impossible ideas, to overcome the most entrenched of stereotypical notions and cautions.'<sup>50</sup> The radical left played a role in developing the personal relationships of support that encouraged such shifts, as is clear in BDMC. This is an example of what David Featherstone has described as 'the generative, transformative character' of solidarity, which can construct relations between diverse groups and create 'new ways of relating'.<sup>51</sup> Douglass emphasised how solidarity from lesbian and gay groups encouraged people to rethink their attitudes on sexuality. The most prominent such organisation was London Lesbians and Gays Support the

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<sup>47</sup> 'Miners' Strike Songs' (audio recording, 1984), SWML/AUD/469; Vassell, 'The Boys from the Black Stuff', p. 6; 'Black People Support Striking Miners', *Searchlight*; T. Carter, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1986), p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> S. Berlin, 'The Miners in 1984: Paths of Victory', in *Lambeth NALGO Annual Report 1984*, pp. 22–23. RBA/MND/25 Box 1.

<sup>49</sup> 'Black Miners Seek Support', *Caribbean Times*.

<sup>50</sup> Douglass, *Ghost Dancers*, p. 484.

<sup>51</sup> D. Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2012), pp. 5, 19.

Miners (LGSM), which twinned with Dulais in South Wales.<sup>52</sup> Mark Ashton, the instigator of LGSM, was a member of the CP and far-left connections played a role in the establishment of relationships with South Wales.<sup>53</sup> Ashton claimed that LGSM's first meeting consisted entirely of Labour and Communist Party members.<sup>54</sup> Activists from other far-left organisations were also involved and the political diversity was often emphasised: 'we had communists and anarchists, feminists, and trotskysts, liberals and labourites, machos and minis'.<sup>55</sup> LGSM members argued that the common desire to support the strike as a lesbian and gay group forced them to avoid 'incestuous sectarianism'.<sup>56</sup> Although in contrast, Ashton observed that political sectarianism poisoned the atmosphere of some of their meetings.<sup>57</sup> Party political struggles was also one of the reasons for the formation of a separate Lesbians Against Pit Closures group.<sup>58</sup>

As well as developing solidarity relationships with Dulais, LGSM created other networks of connections both within and beyond London. Although there were significant arguments within the groups around its 'whiteness and maleness', attempts were made to broaden the platforms of LGSM meetings.<sup>59</sup> Wilmette Brown, a black lesbian feminist who

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<sup>52</sup> L. Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain: How the Personal Got Political* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 164–8; D. Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners 1984–5', *History Workshop Journal* 77, 1 (2014), pp. 240–62; D. Leeworthy, 'For Our Common Cause: Sexuality and Left Politics in South Wales, 1967–1985', *Contemporary British History* 30, 2 (2016), pp. 260–280.

<sup>53</sup> H. Francis, *History on Our Side: Wales and the 1984–85 Miners' Strike*, second edition (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2015), pp. 110–111.

<sup>54</sup> M. Ashton, 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners! A Short History of Lesbian and Gay Involvement in the Miners' Strike 1984–5', (pamphlet, n.d.), p. 2, LHASC/LGSM/3/3.

<sup>55</sup> S. Browning, C. Richardson, N. Young, S. Chambers, 'Pits and Perverts: Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners 1984–1985', (pamphlet, n.d.), p. 2, LHASC/LGSM/2/4.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ashton, 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners', p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *All Out! Dancing in Dulais* (documentary, 1986), [www.coolcave.co.uk/blog/video/all-out-dancing-in-dulais-1986.html](http://www.coolcave.co.uk/blog/video/all-out-dancing-in-dulais-1986.html) (accessed 13 May 2016); see also P. Vittorini, N. Field, and C. Methol, 'Lesbians Against Pit Closures', in V Seddon (ed), *The Cutting Edge: Women and the Pit Strike* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1986), pp. 142–48.

<sup>59</sup> Browning et al., 'Pits and Perverts', p. 2; see also Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality', pp. 247–8.

was involved with BDMC, was one of those invited by LGSM to speak.<sup>60</sup> An LGSM conference had speakers from Rhodesia Women's Action Group, the National Abortion Campaign, the Terence Higgins Trust, Labour Lesbians Group, and Lesbians and Gays Against Imperialism, amongst others.<sup>61</sup> LGSM took part in general support activity within London, joining power station picket lines for example, and worked with other support groups in the Miners Defence Committee, bringing the politics of sexuality explicitly into the broader campaign.<sup>62</sup>

London LGSM also inspired a number of groups across Britain and Ireland. Various sources noted lesbian and gay support groups in Huddersfield, Dublin, Swansea, Cork, Glasgow, Leicester, Southampton, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cardiff, Nottingham, Edinburgh/Lothian, York and Manchester.<sup>63</sup> While there was no national organisation, London LGSM was in contact with a number of these groups.<sup>64</sup> Giving a sense of the connections constructed, at one of LGSM's weekly meetings they had guests from the South Wales coalfield, Manchester LGSM and the Dublin Lesbian and Gay Collective.<sup>65</sup> Contacts were made further afield with international activists and interviews featured for example in *Radical America* in the USA and *Il Manifesto* in Italy.<sup>66</sup> LGSM developed a dense network of overlapping solidarities at various scales. Their activity was generative of new connections

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<sup>60</sup> Mike Jackson, letter to Hefina Headon, 7 October 1984, LHASC/LGSM/2/1; Bishop, 'Black Delegation to Kent Miners'.

<sup>61</sup> LGSM, 'Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners Conference - The Way Forward' (leaflet, 1985), LHASC/LGSM/5/2.

<sup>62</sup> LGSM minutes, 10 February 1985, LHASC/LGSM/1/2.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Canning, letter to the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, 27 November 1984, LHASC/LGSM/2/1; Labour Research Department, *Solidarity with the Miners: Actions and Lessons from the Labour Research Department's Survey of over 300 Miners' Solidarity Groups* (London: Labour Research Department, 1985); B. Cant (ed), *Footsteps and Witnesses: Lesbian and Gay Lifestories from Scotland* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993), pp. 94-5; Mike Jackson, letter to Alan Dalton, 6 February 1985, LHASC/LGSM/2/2.

<sup>64</sup> Mike Jackson, letter to Mark Ovendon, 25 October 1984, LHASC/LGSM/2/1; Mike Jackson, letter to Bill Foley, 1 December 1984, LHASC/LGSM/2/1.

<sup>65</sup> LGSM minutes, 31 March 1985, LHASC/LGSM/1/2.

<sup>66</sup> Flynn, Goldsmith, and Sutcliffe, 'We Danced in the Miners' Hall'; Andy Matheson, 'Il Manifesto Translation', n.d., LHASC/LGSM/3/2; M. Goodsell, 'A Report from the LESBIAN & GAY MINERS SUPPORT GROUP (London)', *Black Dragon*, 18 January 1985, press cutting LHASC/LGSM/3/5.

among activists within London, between lesbian and gay activists and the coalfields, and perhaps as importantly between lesbian and gay activists campaigning on a labour dispute in Britain, Ireland and to a lesser extent beyond.

### **Boundary struggles**

The translocal solidarities constructed by groups such as LGSM and BDMC were in part an attempt to challenge divisions on the radical left, elements of which were hostile to a politics that took seriously questions of race, gender and sexuality. For Derek Hatton, Deputy Leader of Liverpool Council and member of Militant, there was a significant difference between their working-class councillors and the middle-class ones in places like Islington more concerned with so-called identity politics.<sup>67</sup> As Jane Wills has commented, 'geography is often used as a surrogate for the question of class.'<sup>68</sup> Positioning anti-racism, feminism, and LGBT liberation as London concerns simultaneously constructed such politics as middle class. Understanding such differences spatially has a way of hardening boundaries between social groups.<sup>69</sup> The solidarity of the miners' strike, and the warm personal connections developed between diverse places and people, suggested the potential for resisting such boundaries. There can be a tendency to echo the counterposing of class politics to gender, sexual and racial 'identity politics' in academic discussions of these issues, missing the complexity of what were often explicitly socialist feminist, anti-racist and LGBT activists.<sup>70</sup> Rather than an attack on class as

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<sup>67</sup> D. Frost and P. North, *Militant Liverpool: A City on the Edge* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 97 and passim; see also D. Payling, "'Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire': Grassroots Activism and Left-Wing Solidarity in 1980s Sheffield', *Twentieth Century British History* 25, 4 (2014), pp. 602–27. Militant certainly were not the only Trotskyist organisation with a poor record on such questions: see Robinson, *Gay Men and the Left*.

<sup>68</sup> J. Wills, 'Mapping Class and Its Political Possibilities', *Antipode* 40, 1 (2008), p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> G. Pratt and S. Hanson, 'Geography and the Construction of Difference', *Gender, Place & Culture* 1, 1 (1994), p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Frost and North, *Militant Liverpool*, p. 37; T. Rutherford, 'De/Re-Centring Work and Class?: A Review and Critique of Labour Geography', *Geography Compass* 4, 7 (2010), p. 771.

such, Massey and Wainwright saw in the miners' support campaign 'a mutual dependence and a new openness to influence' between new social movements and trade unions, which 'demonstrated a different direction for class politics', not its abandonment.<sup>71</sup>

While groups like LGSM showed the potential for far-left activists to work together and with others in support of the strike, inevitably this was not the whole picture. The miners' dispute presented an opportunity for different groups to prove their worth against each other and reinforce distinctions on the left. Dave Douglass believed that 'when push comes to shove in dangerous situations on the picket lines, the "left" are way back with an arm full of papers while the Anarchist is stood to the end with you.'<sup>72</sup> London anarchist Pete Ridley highlighted the anarcho-syndicalist trade union networks of European support that were mobilised independently of the NUM. He argued that those 'in the Direct Action Movement were pretty active with the miners' strike, collecting funds, helping on picket lines, etc. Consequently anarcho-syndicalism (anarchism) got a good name with the miners who were sick of the so-called "Left" who only pushed their particular brand of "bossism"'.<sup>73</sup> There is evidence of some limited anarcho-syndicalist influence, for example in contacts developed between Doncaster miners and Barcelona dockers, but more broadly this is probably wishful thinking.<sup>74</sup> Franks has argued that the miners' strike had a much greater influence on anarchists than they had on it.<sup>75</sup> The strike does not appear to have led to significant recruitment among miners or their families for any section of the far left, with some accounts suggesting Labour was more often the beneficiary of politicisation in the coalfields.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Massey and Wainwright, 'Beyond the Coalfields', p. 168.

<sup>72</sup> Douglass, *Ghost Dancers*, p. 90.

<sup>73</sup> P. Ridley, 'London, England', *SRAF Bulletin* 91, September (1985), p. 7; see also 'Europe Supports', *Black Flag*, 11 February 1985, p. 3.

<sup>74</sup> 'Barcelona Dockers', *Rank and File Miner*, June 1985, p. 1, LHASC/WAIN/1/11.

<sup>75</sup> B. Franks, 'British Anarchisms and the Miners' Strike', *Capital & Class* 29, 3 (2005), p. 233.

<sup>76</sup> S. McGrail and V. Patterson, *'For as Long as It Takes!': Cowie Miners in the Strike, 1984-5* (self-published pamphlet, 1985), p. 32; B. Heathfield, 'Women of the Coalfields', (unpublished book draft, 1985), p. 30,

In contrast to anarchists, elements of the CP appeared more interested in asserting their respectability than demonstrating their radicalism. The communist threat loomed large in the fevered rhetoric of Thatcher and other elements of the hard right. The CP was a central element of the 'hydra that threatens liberty'.<sup>77</sup> Yet some within the CP sought to construct those to their left as alien to the labour movement. The 'ultra-left' were described by prominent Communists and the *Morning Star* as 'fringe groups' and 'alien forces', with similar language used by parts of the trade union movement in which the CP had influence.<sup>78</sup> Such attitudes reflected a broader attempt by sections of European Communism to establish itself as reputable. In 1968, for instance, the French CP presented itself as the party of order against extremists in the student movement.<sup>79</sup> Some miners saw the radical left as outsiders as well. During a demonstration in London one Yorkshire miner apparently commented that such groups were 'just scavengers', with stewards commenting that 'we just want miners here'.<sup>80</sup> In the coalfields reactions were mixed. Ann Harris from the Notts Central Women's Support Group, for instance, explained how they 'had visits from different groups, the WRP, they didn't go down very well, and a Finish camera crew from a feminist magazine – and the Greenham women; they went down a bomb!'<sup>81</sup>

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TWL/7BEH/1/2; 'What Did You Do in the Strike, Mum?', *Spare Rib*, 151, February (1985), p. 7. Tariq Ali argued that unlike the 1930s when disaffected young miners would have joined the CP, there was no obvious equivalent in the 1980s. Ali, untitled article, *Time Out*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> The Economic League, 'Special Report. Ruthless, Cunning and Contemptuous: Political Manipulation of the Miners', July 1984, TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only box no. 1, 'Miscellaneous Leaflets' folder.

<sup>78</sup> J. Arnison, 'Lancashire to Get Strike HQ', *Morning Star*, 10 May 1984, p. 3; Bert Ramelson, letter to Pete Carter, 30 April 1985, LHASC/CP/CENT/IND/07/02; Allan Baker, letter to Pete Carter, 18 April 1985, LHASC/CP/CENT/IND/07/02; J. Phillips, *Collieries, Communities and the Miners' Strike in Scotland, 1984-85* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), p. 117; Adams and Durkin, 'Some Observations and Suggestions'; B. Cohen, 'Notes of Meeting at New Scotland Yard', 5 September 1984, BA/19885/SC/4/1.

<sup>79</sup> G. Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 348.

<sup>80</sup> D. Campbell, 'The Red Flag and the Thick Blue Line', *City Limits* 178, 1-7 March 1985, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> 'What Did You Do in the Strike', *Spare Rib*, p. 7.

The CP's industrial organiser Peter Carter wrote a draft pamphlet on the strike, unpublished largely because of its hostility towards the NUM leadership, which was as much a polemic against the far left as an analysis of the dispute.<sup>82</sup> The 'various Trotskyite groups' were criticised by Carter primarily for their 'despicable role' in failing to condemn miners' violence, which he believed was decisive in weakening support for the strike. But the London Labour left, those around Ken Livingstone, as well as Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner, were equally culpable. Their 'sectarian approach during the strike actually brought about a realignment of the Left which involved sections of the Left in the Labour Party, the Parliamentary Labour Party and sections of the trade union movement, who found allies in, and spoke the same language as the Trotskyists.'<sup>83</sup> This alliance was arguably the basis for the Mineworkers' Defence Committee (MDC), a group established by Ken Livingstone and other prominent London Labour lefts, which sought to co-ordinate and intensify solidarity for the miners. Carter warned CP District Secretaries that the main group behind MDC was the Trotskyite Socialist Action. The MDC was accused of attempting to usurp the TUC, and wanting to turn days of action for the miners into general strikes. 'The policy and strategy of the Miners Defence Committee', Carter wrote, 'is very dangerous, adventurist and will do enormous damage to the trade union and labour movement if not challenged.'<sup>84</sup>

This suggests the need to understand the 'far left' as a complex and unstable formation. While elements of the CP sought to integrate themselves within the political mainstream, sections of the Labour left were considerably more radical, and not just

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<sup>82</sup> This emphasis was criticized by others in the CP. Ramelson, letter to Carter; Baker, letter to Carter. The scourge of ultra-leftism was also attacked during the miners' strike by prominent former CP member Jimmy Reid as 'a middle class phenomenon: a philosophy for political dilettantes'. J. Reid, 'What Scargill Means', *New Society*, 17 January 1985, pp. 91–93.

<sup>83</sup> P. Carter, 'Coal Pamphlet' second draft, (unpublished, 1985), LHASC/CP/CENT/IND/07/02.

<sup>84</sup> Peter Carter, letter to District Secretaries, 6 February 1985, LHASC/CP/CENT/IND/07/02.

Trotskyist entryist groups. As well as forming the MDC, the municipal socialists in London left councils also used state resources to provide practical solidarity.<sup>85</sup> Haringey Council made all local authority buildings—including libraries, schools, and community centres—collection points for the miners, politicising what would often be considered neutral spaces.<sup>86</sup> Other London councils provided office space and facilities for miners organising support in London.<sup>87</sup> Southwark Council took the lead in blacklisting firms involved in strikebreaking from council contracts.<sup>88</sup> Council workers in some London local authorities were encouraged to donate through wage deductions to the strike support fund.<sup>89</sup> More broadly, the policies of the GLC and others in supporting campaigning organisations helped sustain solidarity activism. They contributed funding for spaces in the capital, from Trade Union Resource Centres to the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, that were used to support the miners' strike.<sup>90</sup> This again blurred the boundaries between the Labour Party and the extra-parliamentary left. While there were of course weaknesses in the municipal socialist project, the support the GLC and others provided for the miners' strike suggested ways of using the local state apparatus to push back against neoliberalism.<sup>91</sup>

The spaces that the Labour left helped sustain were important. Stephen Brooke has observed that in London 'post-68 social movements [...] sought to gain a physical presence in

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<sup>85</sup> This was of course true for councils in mining areas as well. For example, some local authorities deferred rents for miners in council housing. See Phillips, *The Miners' Strike in Scotland*, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> Rouffiniac, *Haringey Supporting the Miners 1984-1985*, p. 14.

<sup>87</sup> R. Smith, 'Anger at Council's Help for Miners', *South London Press*, 25 September 1984, p. 3; Massey and Wainwright, 'Beyond the Coalfields'.

<sup>88</sup> 'Councils urged to boycott strike breakers', *Tribune*, 22 June 1984, p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> 'Camden NALGO Miners Support Group Bulletin', No. 3 (n.d.), TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only box no. 1, 'Support Groups' folder.

<sup>90</sup> D. Thomas, 'Union Resource Centres Threatened by the Cuts', *Tribune*, 16 March 1984, p. 7; 'New Resources for the Trade Union Movement Under Threat', (pamphlet, n.d.), HA/D/5/52/6/1/44; 'Magnificent Base for West London Trade Unionists', *UCATT Viewpoint*, January 1985, p. 2; P. Charman, 'Gay Grant', *Time Out*, 19 April 1984, p. 7; 'Dulais Wears Our Badge on Its van', *Capital Gay*, 5 April 1985, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> A. Cumbers, 'Constructing a Global Commons In, Against and Beyond the State', *Space and Polity* 19, 1 (2015), pp. 62–75.

the city (through the establishment of centres) in the 1980s. If there were enterprise zones, there were also social democracy zones as well.<sup>92</sup> This could be extended to include spaces such as union resource centres, and integrating the role of Labour councils—as Brooke does—highlights the overlapping of labour and post-68 liberation movements. An expanded sense of these spaces would include those at the intersection of the commercial and the political, for instance the lesbian and gay pubs and clubs that LGSM collected outside, and held fundraisers and meetings in.<sup>93</sup> As Lucy Delap has argued in relation to feminist bookshops in this period, attention to such spaces can complicate ideas of social movements as ephemeral.<sup>94</sup> Bookshops such as Collet's, Gay's the Word, and New Beacon, played a role in the miners' support movement.<sup>95</sup> This presence was paralleled by spaces such as the miners' welfare centres in the coalfields. Both in London and in mining areas such physical rootedness embedded labour and radical politics in localities, but at the same time enabled the construction of solidarities across space. It is necessary then to see how political movements can be 'place based, but not necessarily place restricted'.<sup>96</sup>

While the radical left played a significant role in the support movement, it was unable to exert a decisive influence on the struggle. The declining state of the CP was particularly important in this. The Thatcherite right almost certainly had an exaggerated sense of the importance of communist influence in post-war British trade unionism, although Labour was

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<sup>92</sup> S. Brooke, 'Living in "New Times": Historicizing 1980s Britain', *History Compass* 12, 1 (2014), p. 28.

<sup>93</sup> Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality'.

<sup>94</sup> L. Delap, 'Feminist Bookshops, Reading Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement in Great Britain, C. 1974–2000', *History Workshop Journal* 81, 1 (2016), p. 172.

<sup>95</sup> A. Wakefield, *The Miners' Strike Day by Day: The Illustrated 1984-85 Diary of Yorkshire Miner Arthur Wakefield* (Barnsley: Wharnccliffe, 2002), p. 160; Kelliher, 'Solidarity and Sexuality'; La Rose, 'Letter to the Miners Families Christmas Appeal'.

<sup>96</sup> P. Routledge and A. Cumbers, *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 197.

not incapable of red-baiting during industrial disputes either.<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, CP activists did have influence in a number of industries, notably in engineering. EP Thompson reflected on NUM General Secretary (1968-84) Lawrence Daly's background in the West Fife CP in the 1950s that there was 'no comparable organization in which a young miner could enlarge his horizons both nationally and internationally, advance his political knowledge, effect contacts with intellectuals and with workers in other industries, while exerting a growing influence within his own community.'<sup>98</sup> The CP played an important role in developing networks of solidarity. Communist activists were key in organising the support of engineering workers at Saltley in the 1972 miners' strike for instance.<sup>99</sup> Raphael Samuel observed that during the 1966-7 Roberts-Arundel strike in Stockport, solidarity action organised by Manchester Communist engineers introduced tactics that would become widespread during trade union disputes in the 1970s: mass pickets, sympathetic demonstrations and mobilisation of help from outside.<sup>100</sup>

The Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU), a body established in the 1960s by the CP, had sufficient influence in 1970 that between 350,000 and 600,000 people responded to their call for unofficial strike action over the Conservative government's industrial relations legislation.<sup>101</sup> The LCDTU still existed at the time of the 1984-85 miners' strike, and was involved in organising demonstrations in London, but was in no position to

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<sup>97</sup> K. Thorpe, 'The "Juggernaut Method": The 1966 State of Emergency and the Wilson Government's Response to the Seamen's Strike', *Twentieth Century British History* 12, 4 (2001), pp. 461–85.

<sup>98</sup> E. P. Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight* (London: Merlin, 1980), p. 71.

<sup>99</sup> David Douglass, *The Wheel's Still in Spin: Stardust and Coaldust, a Coalminer's Mahabharata* (Hastings: Read 'n' Noir, 2009), p. 169.

<sup>100</sup> R. Samuel, 'Class Politics: The Lost World of British Communism, Part Three', *New Left Review* 1, 165 (1987), p. 87.

<sup>101</sup> R. Darlington and D. Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London: Bookmarks, 2001), p. 18.

lead comparable resistance.<sup>102</sup> In part this of course reflected the broader political situation. Nevertheless, the CP itself was considerably weaker, lacking the workplace organisation it once had.<sup>103</sup> The CP may have been 'proud' of their record during the strike but others were less effusive.<sup>104</sup> Bill Matthews from Hatfield Main NUM argued that the CP executive 'played little or no part in the dispute compared with the magnificent role they played in the 1972 and 1974 strikes. During those strikes their organisational contribution was a major reason why the NUM succeeded'.<sup>105</sup>

The comparative weakness of the CP in the mid-1980s in part reflected internal divisions, with bitter arguments between the Eurocommunist-influenced leadership of the party aligned with *Marxism Today* and the more traditional supporters of the *Morning Star*. The nature of trade unionism was central to this dispute and the miners' strike only exacerbated these tensions.<sup>106</sup> Certainly local Communist Parties undertook the kind of general support activity many others did.<sup>107</sup> Yet it is striking how during one of the most significant industrial disputes in British history correspondence in the *Morning Star* and within the London area of the CP was considerably more concerned with internal strife. The fighting within the London CP undoubtedly consumed a lot of energy.<sup>108</sup> This is not to argue that the CP played a lesser role than other parts of the radical left. Rather, it is to acknowledge the diminishing influence of an organisation that had more significant roots in the labour movement than others. As individuals, many activists on the far left were undoubtedly tireless

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<sup>102</sup> T. Gould, circular, 5 February 1985, TUCLC, Miners' Dispute 1984/5 Leaflets and Cuttings Only Box no. 1, 'SERTUC' folder.

<sup>103</sup> Samuel, 'Class Politics', p. 54.

<sup>104</sup> Carter, 'Coal Pamphlet', p. 28.

<sup>105</sup> B. Matthews, 'Strike Lessons', *Rank and File Miner* 1, June 1985, LHASC/WAIN/1/11. However, the role of the CP in these earlier disputes is debated. See Phillips, *The Miners' Strike in Scotland*, p. 38.

<sup>106</sup> Samuel, 'Class Politics', p. 54.

<sup>107</sup> 'Wales Community Support Grows', *Morning Star*, 3 May 1984, p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> London District Communist Party correspondence, LHASC/CP/LON/CORR/2/8.

in supporting the miners' cause, but they lacked the ability to fundamentally alter the trajectory of the dispute.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations of the support, the ways in which the radical left in London and elsewhere helped sustain the year-long miners' strike are worth remembering. The practical solidarity of activists, I suggest, is more important than the slogans and analyses produced by the leadership of small parties. Left activists brought people from the coalfields into London and visited mining areas themselves. They took the strike into Londoners' homes, workplaces, student unions and community centres. Attention to the physical places in which solidarity was enacted highlights how political movements can be simultaneously rooted in localities and able to construct relationships across space. I have argued for a comparatively fluid understanding of the radical left, recognising that its boundaries were unclear and often contested. The autonomously organised support groups of black, feminist, and LGBT activists had varying relationships to the more traditional far left, but their history gives a sense of the diverse alliances that were developed between London and the coalfields, and how solidarity could broaden understandings of class politics.

The belief that the miners' strike was 'the Last Showdown between Thatcher and the Left' encouraged extensive support outside the coalfields but also meant the defeat resonated widely.<sup>109</sup> In the midst of the dispute the radical left could proclaim the return of industrial militancy, but after it failed one anarchist observed that 'a depression seems to have engulfed our movement'.<sup>110</sup> The depression was most strongly felt in the coalfields, of

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<sup>109</sup> Flynn, Goldsmith, and Sutcliffe, 'We Danced in the Miners' Hall', p. 39.

<sup>110</sup> Ridley, 'London, England' p. 7.

course, where the predicted decimation of jobs and communities unfolded. Featherstone has suggested that the significant impact of the solidarity can get lost in 'narrowly goal-based accounts', while recognising the enormous loss and destruction wrought by the Thatcher government.<sup>111</sup> It is necessary to be careful about using the support movement as a way of gleaning positives out of this history. The strike failed, and it is important to ask why. Nevertheless, in stark contrast to the market individualism of the Thatcher government, the mining communities and their supporters showed the possibility of solidarity between diverse places and people. This is a history that can still be an inspiration in the midst of another vicious Conservative government.

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<sup>111</sup> Featherstone, *Solidarity*, p. 33.